

Testimony in support of SB-16

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee: My name is Karen Edwards. I live in Stamford. I am a Professor of Public Health and a retired pediatrician/ public health professional. I'm a supporter of Connecticut Against Gun Violence. **I'm testifying in support of the provision in SB-16 that directs the Office of Injury Prevention within the Department of Public Health to create a gun violence intervention and prevention program.**

As a pediatrician, public health professional and parent, I strongly support this provision within SB-16 because it will provide a foundation to address gun violence, a true public health crisis, through PREVENTION.

Gun violence is a leading cause of preventable death and injury and disproportionately affects people from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds. Last year, in Connecticut, gun homicides were the highest they've been in 25 years, and are almost double the number that occurred in 2018.

The impact of gun violence is broad. In addition to those it kills and injures, it affects those who witness it, especially children, and those who live with fear of gun violence in their communities. The negative impact on individuals living in communities with high levels of gun violence urgently requires a preventive solution.

As with any successful public health intervention, strategies to prevent gun violence must involve community stakeholders working in partnership with dedicated staff who are experts in data collection and analysis. With coordinated planning and assessment of preventive interventions, the collected evaluative data can be used for program improvement and to secure ongoing funding.

I thank the Governor for proposing \$3.6 million to fund community gun violence prevention programs and I strongly urge the legislature to do more by creating an Office of Gun Violence Prevention in the Department of Public Health, with dedicated staff, and committing to more substantial levels of funding, measures both proposed in HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention.

We can't afford to delay implementing these strategies to prevent gun violence. Children and teens are dying, being injured and being otherwise negatively impacted for life. We must take action so that all Connecticut children have the best chance to survive and thrive into healthy adulthood. In addition to these abhorrent impacts of gun violence, there is an enormous economic cost: estimates are that gun violence (of all kinds) costs Connecticut taxpayers between \$60 and \$90 million annually, and that the law enforcement and healthcare costs of a single gun homicide are \$488,000, and each non-fatal shooting costs \$71,000.

I also support other provisions in SB-16, including establishing a gun tracing task force to stop the flow of illegal guns, requiring registration of all ghost guns, creating a state license for gun dealers to ensure compliance with state laws, tightening regulations for carrying guns in public, and making domestic violence convictions an automatic disqualifier for carrying guns in public.

I do **support HB-5416** to crack down on straw purchasing by limiting firearm purchases to one per month.

I **oppose SB-388 and HB-5412** which would allow use of deadly force in vehicles and places of worship regardless of whether someone is at risk of harm.

I **oppose HB-5392** which would allow off-duty police officers to carry guns in schools, contrary to existing state and federal law.

I **oppose HB-5415** which would allow banned assault weapons and large capacity magazines to be sold.

In closing, I support the establishment of an Office of Gun Violence Prevention as a very effective strategy for addressing the public health crisis caused by gun violence, and I urge the legislature to commit to more substantial levels of funding.

Thank you to the Committee for hearing my testimony.

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